

ABSTRACT

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DAVENPORT, GWENDOLYN ELIZABETH B.A. SAINT LEO COLLEGE, 1983

A CASE STUDY OF A GANG MEMBER FROM A LARGE INNER-CITY AREA

Advisor: Dr. K. S. Murty

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This study is an indepth analysis of the life history of a deceased young black male gang member in a large inner-city area. Information for this study was collected through personal interviews with gang members prior to his death; and, following his death, with several members who interacted with him. Several criminological theories - strain, differential association, subcultural, generality of deviance, and labeling - were applied to this gang member's behavior.

The study findings disclosed that the gang member's life events fit within the frameworks of these theories. As a lower-class young male, he suffered the loss of self-respect. Although he admittedly was well aware of the criminal codes and acts, he adopted certain delinquent and violent subcultural values, norms, and behavioral prescriptions similar to those of urban gang members. Lacking self-control he was impulsive, insensitive, street smart, and physical.

A CASE STUDY OF A GANG MEMBER FROM A LARGE
INNER-CITY AREA

A THESIS

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GWENDOLYN ELIZABETH DAVENPORT

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Youth gangs in the United States are constantly increasing with such a powerful mystique that a mere mention of the word "gang" evokes images of black-jacketed youths roaming the streets at night in groups bearing such colorful names as the Mafia Crips, the Bounty Hunters, and the Savage Skulls (Goldstein, 1991). Gangs and gang behavior generally imply cohesive groups that maintain rules and customs and develop ongoing traditions. Miller (1974) surveyed 160 criminal justice and youth service agencies to examine their respective definitions of gang. He observed six major elements that are in consistency with most of the agencies: (1) being organized, (2) having identifiable leadership, (3) identifying with a territory, (4) associating continually, (5) having a specific purpose, and (6) engaging in illegal activities. Furthermore, in contemporary perspective, the gang members are more violent and more drug involved.

A Brief Overview of Historical Gang Development

Delinquent ganging in this nation evolved from a long varied tradition of group violence. Between 1760 and 1900, 500 vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the White Capper, the Black Legion, etc., appeared in the United States (Gurr, 1989). Whippings, bombings, arson, and murders were their common violent tools for terrorizing ethnic and

religious minorities and other targets of their hate. Less organized but directed toward similar violent ends were lynch mobs, responsible for taking the lives of 3,400 Black Americans between 1882 and 1951 (Gurr, 1989). Piracy; banditry; feuding; labor, agrarian, and race riots; and the frequently glamorized marauding bands of frontier outlaws, such as Butch Cassidy's High Five and the Jesse James gang, are all in their own ways ancestors of the contemporary gang (R. M. Brown, 1980). The Forty Thieves, an Irish-American immigrant gang formed in 1820 in the Five Points District of New York City, is cited by the Illinois State Police (1989) as the first modern, adult criminal gang. It gave rise, as did many of the adult gangs that followed, to an "auxiliary" or "sub-gang" of juveniles, in this instance called the Forty Little Thieves.

Other such adult and juvenile gangs quickly followed - the Kerryonians, the Dusters, the Plug Uglies, the Dead Rabbits, and others (Asbury, 1927-1971). The Illinois State Police (1989), believed that the original gangs were formed by young men rebelling against their low social status; and that they came from areas of overcrowded, substandard housing, poor or nonexistent health care facilities, broken homes, and few economic opportunities. Their original intent may have been simple camaraderie born of shared frustrations at perceived social or economic injustices. Whatever the reason, their original purpose eventually degenerated to social resentment and ultimately they manifested that resentment in criminal activity.

Notions About Causation

The reasons for which youth choose to participate in gangs have varied among researchers over a period of time. Thrasher (1927), sought causative explanation both within

the youth themselves and within the community to which they belong. To him, a typical gang member is a healthy, well-adjusted, red-blooded American boy seeking an outlet for normal adolescent drives for adventure and expression. Inadequacies in family functioning, schools, housing, sanitation, employment, and other community characteristics combined to help motivate a youth to turn to the gang for life satisfactions and rewards.

Focusing on social causation, Bogardus (1943), saw the war and the warlike climate in the United States responsible for the formation of aggressive gangs on the West Coast at the time. Dumpson (1949), blamed the war, racism, and diverse economic and political sources. In his detail study, Miller (1982), observed that youth gangs persist because they are a product of conditions basic to our social order. Among these are a division of labor between the family and the peer group in the socialization of adolescents, and emphasis on masculinity and collective action in the male subculture, a stress on excitement, congregation, and mating in the adolescent subculture; the importance of toughness and smartness in the subcultures of lower-status populations; and the density and conditions of territoriality patterns affecting the subcultures of urban and urbanized locales.

Edgerton (1988), unlike Thrasher, emphasizes that multiple marginality including residential segregation in low-income areas, poverty, poor school performance, little parental supervision, discrimination, and distrust of law enforcement contribute to gang formation. Under the foregoing conditions, young people spend much of their lives together on the streets where a gang would serve them as a surrogate family, school, and police. Gang membership is appealing to the members in terms of friendship, pride, prestige, belongingness, identity, self-esteem, and a desire to emulate their uncles and older brothers

who were gang members before them. Gove (1994), in a general inquiry of why we do what we do, presents an outline of theory of human motivation that draws on biological, psychological, and social process. Specifically, this theory focuses on: (1) the intrinsic unpredictability of the world that people experience; (2) the innate and non-innate differences in the attributes of individuals; (3) the premise that persons can notably be viewed as responsible for their actions; (4) the importance of a meaningful life and how this life is obtained; (5) reformulating learning theory by including the principle that behavior activates a physiologic process that is intrinsically rewarding, a process that raise questions about basic suppositions of symbolic interactionism, cognitive psychology, and rational choice theory; (6) the causes and consequences of gender differences in instrumental and nurturant behavior; (7) an examination of why the positive states and psychological well-being are often associated with a high level of stress and a lack of personal control; (8) the process of adult psychological maturation, which indicates that as persons age they become more contented with their lives and more concerned with the well-being of others; and (9) the imitations of the concept of "agency" in structuration theory, as it is not attentive to the differences among individuals in their capabilities, personalities, and unique life experiences.

Perhaps by applying the negative aspects of these elements we can explain gang delinquency and violent behavior. For example, Walter B. Miller (1958), when attempted to explain urban gang delinquency, saw lower-class values as having developed from a deviant sub-culture. The values were merely the result of cultural adaptation to the living conditions in urban areas. He theorized that a male child had to escape the female-dominated household to find male role models. The gang performs this function and provides a place where young

males can practice male roles and values. The essence of the lower-class value system, for males, can be characterized as emphasizing smartness, trouble, toughness, fate, autonomy, and excitement. All these values contribute to delinquent behavior when viewed from the middle-class perspective. Thus, in following their own value systems, young urban lower-class males will automatically come into conflict with a larger society and contact with law enforcement personnel will result in a delinquent label.

As gangs become more violent, as drug involvement, and availability of weapons have increasingly characterized gang life, the youth gang increasingly has been perceived by the criminal justice system to be dangerous and deserving of the harshest punishment. Goldstein (1991), for example, was told by three law enforcement officers that he interviewed:

Don't half-step them. Hit the ground hard, put them down, all the way; These people are more than gangs, they're terrorists; As a cop, my problem is what they do, not why they do it. I'm not a sociologist.

Well, it happened. As recently as in 1994, John Doe,¹ a young black gang member of Dixie City, was shot and killed by Herman County police officer, Baker. This study presents the life history events of John Doe as observed and experienced by his family members, neighbors, classmates, counselors, ministers, and law enforcement officials, along with possible theoretical explanations. Such an analysis will not only enhance our current level of understanding of gang behavior but will provide families in similar situations and policy makers with the knowledge of sequential progression of risk behavior as well as methods to identify and intervene at an early stage of such progression.

¹Identity of actors and players involved in this study is deliberately concealed for maintaining research ethics.

Characteristics of Youth Gangs

French (1994), identified the following characteristics of youth gang: (1) a loose knit group consisting of (2) predominately males in the age group of 14 to 24 years and having (3) a recognized leader and (4) a group name. The group also (5) claims a territory or turf and engage in (6) regular violation of the law. The members of the group (7) regularly meet and socialize. French also distinguishes between the hierarchy of gang members. A **hardcore member**, for example, tends to be a leader, most violent, streetwise, and knowledgeable on legal matters. An **associate gang member** is the one who is looking for status and recognition, accepting distinct dress codes, attending all social functions, and adopting gang symbols (e.g., tattoos, graffiti, colors, and hand signs). On the contrary, a **peripheral gang member** is the one who moves in and out of the gang and changes his interest in gang activities.

Youth gangs exist primarily for the following reasons: identity or recognition, protection or security, fellowship, brotherhood, intimidation, attention, emotional support, money, excitement, clear codes of conduct, status, new experience and sense of belonging (Foster, 1994; Wilson, 1994). Webb (1992) and Turner (1994), characterize gang members as having weapons, friends that no one in the family has met, money, and nervous behavior. Being aggressive and hostile, they are frequently hard to talk with. They may be argumentative, absent from school and home, engaging in fights or other trouble at school when attended, taking negative role models, and getting in and out of trouble with the police. Coming from lower class backgrounds they do not receive adequate attention, and are victims of abuse or neglect.

Scope of the Study

This study is an in-depth analysis of the life history of a deceased young black male gang member in a large inner-city. The required information for this endeavor was collected through prolonged (average length of three hours), unstructured, personal interviews with the gang member under study prior to his death; and with his parents, neighbors, classmates, law enforcement officials, counselors, and a minister subsequent to his death. Some of these interviewees were contacted more than once, not only to gather additional information but to verify any inconsistencies observed among the respondents. This process helped to obtain the maximum information possible as well as to maintain internal validity between the responses.

The study also includes a selected literature review to provide theoretical underpinnings for behavioral changes at certain stages of the subject's life.

Methodology

The required qualitative data for this study was collected through a series of personal interviews: (1) directly with the study subject between July, 1993 and April, 1994, the month he was shot dead; and, (2) with his family members, classmates, neighbors, counselors, minister, and law enforcement officials who had interacted with him or observed him during the times of his confinement to a correctional institution. These later interviews took place between November, 1994 and February, 1995; that is, nearly six months following the subject's death. All were topical interviews utilizing unstructured interview schedules. The interview topics and procedures of interviewing were initially agreed upon by the interviewer and her research advisor at Clark Atlanta University Criminal Justice Department. Each

interview lasted from two to five hours per session and some of the respondents were interviewed more than once because either they could not complete the interview in one session due to time constraints or the interviewer sought additional information after reviewing initial response(s). With the respondents' permission, the interviewer tape recorded the interviews in addition to her field notes. All recorded responses and field notes were reviewed by both the interviewer and her research advisor for the purposes of proper editing, testing, and analyzing.

The content validity of the responses was taken at face value due to the fact that these interviewers claimed to have had a first-hand interaction with the study subject and had known him on a personal level; and, that it is impossible to compare their responses with any so-called "actual" events. However, the reliability of responses was established by comparing one's claims with other's and by probing certain key questions in greater detail. When available, the interview responses were compared with media reports.

It was originally planned to interview some of the gang members who might have associated with the study subject, but such efforts were unsuccessful because of the problems involved in identifying them, and, even when identified, there was difficulty in locating them. The supplemental information required to construct the profile of the study subject, such as date, time and place of birth, birth weight, family size, prior arrest histories by charge(s), times of arrests, and dispositions were gathered from official records.

The above collected data were analyzed in three phases. First, the information was sorted out along the life stages -early childhood (preschool), childhood (elementary school), adolescent (high school), and early adulthood (post school and gang life). Second, at each

of these life stages, an analysis of events was employed to examine the onset and dynamics of deviant violent behavior of the study subject. Finally, at the third phase, a meaningful theoretical explanation was sought for the observed deviant acts at various life stages. Such an explanation may be important in enhancing our understanding of the etiology of violent gang behavior.

Organization of Thesis

This thesis is organized into six chapters. This chapter includes a statement of the problem, a brief overview of historical gang development, notions about causation, the scope of the study, and the methodology. Chapters II to IV focus on the profile of John Doe in terms of who he is, his early childhood problems, family socialization, interaction patterns with neighborhood kids, school related problems, social and legal problems, introduction to gangs and gang life, and the eventual termination of John Doe's life by Herman County Police Officer Baker. Chapter V is a social psychological autopsy which includes responses from family members, friends, neighbors, law enforcement officers, and ministers. Finally, Chapter VI summarizes and concludes the study, and provides implications for future research.

CHAPTER II

WHO IS JOHN DOE?

John Doe was a popularly known gang member to Herman County's law enforcement personnel. The 22-year old black male was 65 inches tall and weighed 160 pounds when he was shot to death by Baker, a county police officer, on April 22, 1994. He had short black hair, a short mustache, brown eyes, a left pierced ear, tattoos on both upper arms and very short nails when he died.

John was the third of four children to his un-wedded mother, Terry. His older brother is Mark, older sister is Brenda, and younger sister is Zelma. His father, Howard, left the home when he was eight months old. John and his siblings did not have the same father. Like in many instances, Terry did not receive any child support from any of the fathers of her children. She moved to Dixie city when John was three years old along with his siblings. John saw his father, Howard, again when he was ten years old. Though this visit lasted only for a single day they did not get along. So, John's father severed his contacts with John and his mother. They did not see him again.

John always had difficulties in school. He frequently was truant and disruptive in school. He hung out in the streets late at nights beginning when he was in fifth grade. He was frequently involved in physical fights at school and in the neighborhood. Discontinuing

school in the ninth grade, he joined the Westside Crips gang at the age of fourteen years. He spoke non-grammatical broken English and he did not have many friends, either in the school or in the neighborhood. Disobedient to parents and teachers, he was intimidating and threatening to classmates and neighborhood kids, and suffered from learning disabilities and behavioral disorders.

He entered the criminal justice system when he was eighteen years old and in the following four years he became the center of focus in Dixie city. He was arrested for the first time in 1990 for carrying a concealed weapon, carrying a pistol without a license, and again in the same year for selling and distributing cocaine and possessing dangerous drugs (cocaine). During that same year, he went to prison from, December of 1990 to July of 1991. Once he was out of prison, he got in trouble again with the correctional system, in November of 1991, for violation of probation. At this time, he was charged with aggravated assault and obstruction of a police officer. In 1992, he had more trouble with the law. He was charged with possession and distribution of a controlled substances (marijuana), violation of probation, armed robbery, and criminal trespass. He went back to prison from September, 1992 to July, 1993. Within a month after his release from prison, John was rearrested for aggravated assault and possession of a firearm by a felon. The last two times (around October 1993) that John was arrested were for simple battery of his girlfriend. Eight months before his death, he shot a fellow gang member in the shoulder. The victim eventually survived but police found drugs in his car and arrested him. Perhaps the shooting was drug related.

John was a loyal follower rather than being a leader. He received instructions from original gangsters and administered them with loyalty. He did not mind exhibiting his gang paraphernalia in front of his mother. At the time of his death, he had a three-year old daughter and a second baby was soon expected to be born.

CHAPTER III

JOHN DOE'S SCHOOL DAYS

Preschool Period

While John was in preschool, he and his mother, along with his siblings, moved into Peter's (his mother's boyfriend) house. Though this stay was expected to last for a long time and Peter was to become John's stepfather, they all had to leave Peter in approximately a year because he became abusive. For example, John was physically beaten by Peter on repeated occasions. Terry took her children and moved into an apartment in a low income neighborhood. Thus, John never had affection or care from his father or (expected) stepfather.

John attended a head start program in the Dixie City School System, which was funded in part by the Department of Human Resources, Division of Family and Children Services. At the time John was in the program, it was serving approximately 1,196 families of whom 1,100 were headed by female parents, 13 by male parents, and the remaining 83 by both - all belonging to the low socio-economic class. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, some of these children did not receive the anticipated motivation and eventually ended up failing a grade at least once; dropping out of school; becoming a welfare recipient; getting

arrested for delinquent acts; or spending their school years in special education. John was one of these unfortunate few.

Elementary School Period

John attended Perry Elementary School in Dixie City, which graduates children from kindergarten through the seventh grade. Despite his intelligence in understanding the study materials, John had noticeable adjustment problems with other children at school beginning in his third grade year. He was frequently perceived as a disruptive student by many of his teachers.

John was a mama's boy, but Terry had to work sixteen hours a day to support her children, usually leaving home as early as 5:00 a.m. and returning late in the night. This hardship left the children on their own without parental guidance. John would not do what was expected of him. His days of absenteeism from school exceeded those he attended. As an abandoned child, John became very close to his uncle, Frank, when he was in the fifth grade. His uncle was known in the neighborhood for cursing and drinking at all times. John learned profane and abusive language and so did his siblings. Uncle Frank lived with the family for a prolonged period, and Terry was convinced that he could discipline her children and love them all. Neighbors agreed that Frank was nice to his sister's children. Apparently, he was accepted as a male role model for John and his brother.

According to his mother, John attended an elementary school that had a ratio of 100 percent black students to 99.1 percent white teachers. Her remarks indicate that John was subjected to stereotyped treatment of black children in school:

I did not go along with the ratio of the school because white teachers label black students too quickly. One thing about a label, you wear it for the rest of your life. As John grew older, he realized that he was labeled.

Terry said, while laughing, that John did not cut school, he just did not go - indicating that his frequent absences were beyond the normal definition of cutting school. Even among the few days that he attended school, he remained in the principal's office for the most part due to his disciplinary problems. Terry had to take him back to school frequently. She remarked, "I had no problem getting John back in school, the teachers and things loved him."

Though John was perceived by his mother to have been falsely labeled, the reality gradually emerged. "John was in a behavior disorder program in school," she said reluctantly. "Someone told me that was the worse thing I could have done when I agreed to have John put into that program. Well, at the time I didn't know."

A classmate in elementary school as well as a neighbor claimed that she knew John since they were in the first grade. She recalled that John, his two sisters, brother, mother, and uncle moved into the public housing projects when they left Peter's house. Nevertheless, Terry was not a welfare recipient, but was a believer in working. That was the reason she was not home for most of the time on any given day. She never knew if the children went to school as noticed by her neighbors. She depended on her brother Frank. But Uncle Frank cursed at all times which might have led John and his siblings to repeat the profanity. Thus Frank was a negative role model for the children. Contrary to the claims, Terry lost control over her children which was evidenced by the fact that both sons and a daughter dropped out of high school and that both daughters had babies out of wedlock. Perhaps Terry could not

prevent it from happening, due to her own track record of having children without being married.

According to the neighbors, John did not get along with the other children in the neighborhood because he did not play fair and they feared him. But, for some strange reason, he was easily influenced by certain people. The respondent recalled a fight that John had with her when they were in the sixth grade. She said that she is yet to understand why John assaulted her that day. Reportedly, he just went up to the water fountain where she was and started cursing her. He apologized the next day. She remembered another example. One day at school John said that he was going to fight the twins in his sixth grade class, known as the "Heard boys," after school. Several people assembled on the side street of the school building after school. John pulled his shirt off and started fighting the "Heard" twins. While they were fighting a car hit John. John fell on the ground and got up and started fighting again. When John was hit by that car, he was bleeding from his head but that did not stop him from coming at the Heard twins again. He was determined to win the fight. This scene left a lasting memory for those who witnessed it.

If John found anyone who was unable to defend themselves, he would readily volunteer to fight for them. As one respondent interpreted, "Hey, he always wanted to start fights. He was not easy to get along with. But, as long as the attention was on John he did alright." She went on to explain that the children at the elementary school were frightened because of John's attitude toward them.

He always was trying to prove a point and did not want to listen. He did not want to even listen to his mother and would tell her that she did not tell him what to do and would turn around and walk out. For some reason, he would not do his class work and he was always fighting. So, his school performance

was very poor, he stayed in trouble but as far as I know he did not stay in legal trouble.

She concluded that John truly had a "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality."

John Doe's counselor, Mrs. Jean Price, said John first came to her when she was a behavioral disorder teacher at Perry Elementary School. She did not remember what school he came from before he got to Perry Elementary School. She tried to work with him in numerous ways and was unsuccessful for John failed to respond. She perceived John as "hostile," "angry," "short tempered," and "dissatisfied." She recalled, as a part of a routine experiment with John, she took him to a book room, located next to his classroom, and said,

John you know, I really care about you; I have tried everything I know how to reach you; I have tried all kinds of strategies and given you rewards; took away privileges and you have worn me out. Now, you tell me what else I can do for you? Just one-on-one, so we can work out something to help you get better. I want to help you so bad.

Then, John started to cry. They were both in the room crying.

John, I am not going to give up on you, I'm going to love you and I am not going to give up on you. I have to help you so that you can get better.

She did not know how long they stayed in that room just talking and crying but that was like a turning point for John. He started responding after that. Not only did he get better, he even started helping some other children in the program. At this time, he was in about the sixth or seventh grade.

A weekly progress report, generally referred to as a checklist, was prepared by Mrs. Price to document the student's progress. Though it signified lack of progress on John's part until the foregoing incident, it showed signs of improvement thereafter. On several occasions she took him home with her and allowed him to choose and wear some of her son's clothes.

He frequently picked out clothes that had price tags. Over a time period, John was closely acquainted with her family. John started spending increasing number of hours at her house as time progressed. She noticed John acting in an intelligent way and doing his academic work on a relatively regular basis. She commented:

We started working real well together. I started mainstreaming him to some of the other classes, not for the whole day, just for certain periods. He was with me for most of the day. He would go to some of the other classrooms and sometimes he would come back real upset. He would say, I can't do it Mrs. Price, I just can't do it. I'm having too much trouble with it.

So, one day I said,

John, I know I'm not suppose to tell you this but it's the game that people play. When you go into the teacher's room, it is your responsibility to learn and you will have to feel for that teacher's personality and kind of work around it.

At first, I did not think that John understood what I had said to him, but he came back two weeks later and said,

Mrs. Price you know what, now I understand what you were saying. You just have to get to know people and what the situation is and just fit yourself into that situation.

John, as seen by Mrs. Price, was the type of person who really liked a lot of things and had the ability to love and care for people. Realizing that his father's absence at home might be a critical issue for John, Mrs. Price told John that several other children in the classroom did not have their respective fathers living with them either and that he was not to blame himself for it being out of his control. In an attempt to draw a parallel between her childhood experience and of John's, she explained that her mother, a drug addict, left her with her father. Mrs. Price confidently said, "John I turned out alright despite my mother's absence and you can too without your father."

Mrs. Price also had drawn reasons for John's disorderly conduct partially from his child abuse by both Peter, his mother's boyfriend; and Frank, his uncle. She doubted that the abuse might have been triggered by the fact that John was very difficult to handle, difficult to reach, and was real active. To her, some people were not trained to handle such difficult situations delicately, and black people from generation to generation felt that the best way to handle kids like John was by "being tough on them," which translates to beating them.

Following John's graduation, Mrs. Price became a counselor but was still visited by John periodically. She admitted that John, when away for long periods of time, gave honest explanations for his arrests and incarcerations. Nonetheless, he never discussed his gang life with her. She observed him once wearing the gang clothing and encouraged him to take the blue and white scarf off his head. John complained to Mrs. Price that he could not work at places like McDonald because he could not make enough money. He also admitted that he had some babies out of wedlock, which signaled to Mrs. Price that John was getting into trouble.

Mrs. Price was disappointed with this reversing trend in John's behavior and justified her efforts philosophically:

Some people with help can cope better and some people with support can cope better. You are going to have some issues in life; some people by nature can cope with that; some people by support can cope with that; and some people by nature chose not to deal with that as well as others; most people have a hard time dealing with that but they handle it in a positive way.

High School Period

John entered Owens High School in Dixie City to begin the eighth grade soon after graduating from seventh grade at Perry Elementary School. His enrollment in a behavioral

disorder program did not cease at elementary school. From day one, he was enrolled in the behavioral disorder program at high school.

His neighbor, who claims to have known John over several years, noticed his poor academic performance in high school, but was unsure of specific problems that he encountered. She remembered that John never brought any books home nor was he involved in doing any lessons or assignments. His main interest was to spend time on the streets with other marginal kids rather than focusing on his school materials and education. His demotivation to education, behavioral adjustment problems, and compelling interest to pass time with other deviant kids on the street resulted in his dropping out of school the very next year, when he was in the ninth grade.

Mrs. Price, the elementary school counselor, said that John could not get adequate counseling in high school because the counselors were overly preoccupied with student schedules and other paper work. The neighborhood in which John grew up did not and still does not have any recreation facilities for the children. So, John had to go home everyday where he was again left unsupervised. This situation, perhaps, facilitated John to look-up to the gang for fulfilling his emotional needs.

In high school, John got in trouble a lot and was suspended a lot. He was frequently staffed in what is called "resources" - a special class designed for assisting children with behavior and learning disabilities.

CHAPTER IV

POST SCHOOL AND GANG LIFE

The researcher, for the first time, met John Doe in August, 1993, a month after his release from prison, at a friend's residence. Contrary to normal expectations of convicted offenders or of gang members, John was extremely courteous and seemingly sincere. For example, every time I would correct his English he would laugh and correct his vocabulary. He appeared to have confidence in himself and was not overly concerned with how he was perceived by others. He claimed to avoid those he did not like or trust. He warned that "bulldozing" him was risky and dangerous.

The researcher spent an extended length of time talking to John to establish a rapport and increase the comfort level for conversation. This is when John mentioned that he was a gang member with the Westside Crips.¹ The researcher indicated her desire to talk about his gang activities. During a subsequent meeting with John in September, 1993, the researcher informed him that she would like to write about his life with the gang and his life as a child. On hearing this, John was very excited and started the flow of information uninterruptedly

¹The Crips gang characteristics are: 1. they identify with the color blue; 2. they are the enemy of the Blood gang; 3. they will fight each other; and, 4. the word "CRIPS" is usually found in the gang name, such as "Westside Crips". The Crips have been a name that has meant, to many, the environment of misery, anxiety, and horror. The Crips, though originated in the City of Los Angeles, moved to other cities frightening other black youth without justification.

concerning his involvement with the gang. He was eager to talk about the drugs and guns that he had in his possession.

It was not necessary to ask many questions during the interview. John went on talking about his life with the gang in a dramatic way. He talked about the Crips' annual meeting, to which nearly four to five hundred Crips convened from all over the United States once a year. He expressed his proudness of his affiliation with the organization.

John's Gang Activities

John began with explaining an incident in which a law enforcement agent was killed by some of his fellow gang members. He said that he had nothing to do with the killing, but that he did dispose of the agent's body. John said, "As of this day, the agent's body has not been found." John laughed at the low intelligence of the criminal justice system.² Then he got busy with talking about another encounter with the law. He said a police officer came to the apartment where he was hiding. When the police came through the door, he jumped from a third floor window and ran. He started laughing again and said, "They never caught me" - another stab at the intelligence of the criminal justice system. He did not feel degraded in talking about the trouble he had gotten into with the law enforcement administration.

Then, John told about the time he shot a gang member in the shoulder. He did not say if the victim was the member of his gang or of another one. He felt that the man would hurt him if he did not hurt or kill him first. The last event was when he robbed a person of a

² However, his mother felt that John was fabricating. "I think John was a wanna-be and that's my personal opinion. Because as far as gangs, John never showed me that sign I needed to see. John was never a thug. He was just a show off."

beeper that he wanted because the guy owed him drug money. Throughout the conversation John was careful about not mentioning the names of any of the gang members, including those with him in prison, or about his family life.

Before concluding the interview, John disclosed the five names he used, his different birthdays, social security numbers and the locations of the birthplaces that he used in the correctional system. John showed his tattoos on both shoulders - one carrying his nickname "Boston," and the other displaying W.C.S. initials across a six-star.

Qui s'excuse s'accuse

The researcher had one last encounter with John, approximately five months before he was killed. Life was not going the way he wanted it to go. John wanted to correct himself, but felt that society/police were not giving him a chance. He broke into tears and said that he had gotten out of the gang to turn his life around. However, he never mentioned any intention of surrendering himself to the police as a sign of a positive change.

Final Phase of John's Life

It was April 22, 1994. The law enforcement officers assembled outside John Doe's home. His girlfriend and their baby were taken outside of the house when she answered the door, with the baby in her arms.

When the officers separated the woman and child from John, one of the officers went into the bedroom where John was in bed and the bedroom door was closed. It is unknown how or why the door was closed. During this time, the other officers came into the house. Hearing a cry for help from the police officer inside the bedroom, they kicked down the

bedroom door to the bedroom and the officer shot John. The officer said John had a handgun.

CHAPTER V

A SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL AUTOPSY

The Mother's Perspective

John's mother said that she never really felt that John was in a gang although he constantly wore the symbols of the gang. As a parent, she never accepted his gang affiliation because he never showed her that side of him.

He never came up to me and said point blank that he was in a gang. My oldest son joked with John a lot about the gang. So, I can't say that I know he was in a gang... I feel that John was not a gang member. I feel like he knew enough that he could stretch the truth to be exciting and that was his point. He always wanted to be exciting. John always wanted to be the show. He was always the type of person who wanted to control. So, I would say that John was not a gang member.

Regarding his two tattoos, she said that he got them while he was in prison and she thought it was a fantasy with him. This frame of mind clearly indicates the mother's denial of her son's gang life.

John's mother remembers an encounter with John regarding his scarf:

He had got a hang-up over that blue scarf and I could not stand it. He didn't wear that scarf around me too much, because I would make him pull it off. Basically, it was just that blue scarf.

She attempted to divert John away from gang life and was unsuccessful.

I felt fear when I realized he was in a gang. I use to counsel John, pray with John, and talk about the Lord with John. Whenever I would talk with John,

he would listen and say, "Okay Mommy." He would not sass me. I never had any problems with John at home. The last time I talked with John, was that Friday before he got killed. I told him to turn himself in, because the police had a warrant for him, and that I would have a lawyer at the jail when he got there. I said, do what is right and I'll be praying for you. John said, "Okay, Ma, I love you." We hugged each other and that was the last time I saw John alive.

John's mother knew that John missed something as far as his father's relationship was concerned.

His relationship with his father was the only problem that John had and he did not know how to deal with that problem. I think that the gang may have had a lot to do with that because he always wanted to be very manly. If John's father had communicated with him, his life would have been different. See, John was eight months old when his father left him. The next time he saw his father, he was about ten years old. At that time, they did not hit it off at all. Now, his father is living up north.

John's mother said that he had a weak spot, but he never wanted anybody to see it. But, being his mother, I knew that weak spot because he was my child. However, she never specified what that weak spot was.

John's mother realized that John might not live much longer just six months before he was killed.

I would have said, "Yes," before these past six months. But, John had begun to change his life. He was always afraid to change. He felt that if he changed, that was a sign of weakness. He said people would take advantage of him and it proved to be right.

Despite her knowledge of John's deviant life-style, his mother justified his personality problems and remembers him for the positive interactions she had.

One day he went to work and brought his money home to me. I was laying in bed and he came in and got down on his knees and said, "Hey, Mommy, Merry Christmas." John would always give me money and I will always remember that he would give his last. He will always be with me. Unfortunately, he had a problem with authority and it wasn't female authority;

it was always men. He always got along with females. John was fine until you pushed him and if you pushed him, then he would come back. John was a very intelligent person and he knew the system. John knew just how far to go with the system.

She had excuses for every charge on which John was arrested. For example, when John was arrested for sale and distribution, possession of drugs, and dangerous drugs (cocaine), his mother said that John was trying to do something he did not know how to do and got it from somebody else, took it straight to the undercover cop despite the warnings he received from his friends. She said this while laughing, implying her son's innocence. She further explained:

The things the police have on John are very simple and funny. It's illegal to sell drugs, but it's not like he was doing it for a living. After this arrest, John stopped going to school. They locked John up and that's how he missed out on his school.

Another example is when John was arrested for possession and distribution of marijuana, Terry said:

That shows how stupid John was. This time he was in downtown smoking reefer. But, the police writes down whatever they want to write down. I know that some of the things that John did were illegal, but it was simple stuff. They [the police] just got it all blown up like he was this big horrible criminal and it was not like that.

Her justification for John's actions continued. When John was arrested for armed robbery and criminal trespass, Terry said:

The fellow [the victim] and John started out as friends and some kind of way there was a disagreement over drugs. John jumped on the dude and beat him up. That is when John took this fellow's beeper and the police turned around and charged the fellow with having drugs in his car.

Referring to John's arrest for aggravated assault and possession of a firearm by a felon, his mother said, "John only shot at the fellow because he thought the fellow was going to shoot at him."

She even found John's violent behavior in prison justifiable.

I visited him while he was there. He fought constantly and stayed in isolation constantly. John had to max out the first day he went to the institution. He had to max out the whole year. Also, if you pushed John, he would push back. That has always been his problem. John fought with the correctional officers in the institution all the time. If the correctional officer said not to do something, John probably did it. He was always calling me. He did not interact with other inmates too much. In fact, they [correctional officers] were probably glad to get rid of him when his time was up.

She suspects the motive behind John's killing was revenge on the part of the police officer.

That was the incident with the same police officer that killed John. That police officer had been after him for the last month or two. From my point of view, I believed that the officer was after John, dead or alive.

When asked about her recommendations, based on her experiences with John, to keep other kids away from taking after John's deviant life-style, Terry said:

Tell them to be themselves and not try to be something they are not; and, don't ever put themselves in that situation where they claim to be something they aren't because they would have to live up to that reputation.

The Associates' Perspective

An old classmate of John's shared her views with the researcher in her bright colorful kitchen. One day John came to her house with a blue rag around his head and a long pony tail. She asked him what had he been doing and he responded by saying, "Taking care of business." Not understanding what he meant, she sought clarification and John said that he

was in the gang in order to take care of himself. Until then, she felt that John was into something but she was unsure of what it was. She recalled some people's remarks about John's gang activity, but she could not believe them at the time because they were only in the ninth grade. But, when heard from John himself that he was recruited into the gang after killing someone, she was scared, saying:

He was the type of person that played hard and I know he could take care of himself. Unfortunately, he has taken care of himself all of his life. I mean, we never saw his mother around or his daddy. No one really played a part in his life. Therefore, I was not really worried about him but scared for him. Not only was I scared for him but I was scared of him as well. I cut my conversations short with him when I would come in contact with him. I did not let him come over to my house and stay long lengths of times like he used to because he only came around when he was in trouble. John always stayed in trouble, from fighting to whatever. Plus, his behavior changed when he joined the gang. He became very tough and developed a "I don't give a damn" type attitude. Even when we were in school many students didn't like him. He stayed in conflict with most of them. There were even some people, who grew up with us, wanted to get rid of him.

She tried to reason John's affiliation with the gang by explaining:

John joined the gang because he did not have anyone in his life, did not have the support that he needed from home, and he did everything on his own. I even remember the times he would come by my house for food and for my brother's old clothes because he didn't have the clothes that he needed. If John had the support and love from his father that he needed and more time with his mother, John's life would have been better. I always felt that John would not live to get twenty-five years old because John always talked about dying.

Just a few weeks before John died, he told her that he knew he would not live long.

The Criminal Justice System Perspective

In the month of December, 1994, the researcher contacted Mr. Jack Boyd, the Assistant Warden in Sarah County that is located forty-five miles north of Dixie City. Referring to John's conflict with correction officers, Mr. Boyd said:

There are a large group of gang members in the institution at any given time. Usually, when these gang members come into the institution, they have to prove themselves to the other gang members. So, they are in constant conflict with the correctional system.

At this time the researcher was denied access to John's psychological records on the grounds of John's juvenile status. It is the system's policy not to allow anyone to view a juvenile's file.

Mr. Boyd blames the family and the community for failing the child.

Some adult knew that John was having problems and some adult knew that John was a part of a gang before his family realized it. What happened to John was that he did not have power within his home. When he became a gang member he got powerful among a group of individuals. So, in his mind he wanted to become even more powerful. It's just like corporate America. We all have our little gangs. Everybody wants to be chairman of the board one of these days. So you ask yourself, "What do I need to do in order to be chairman of the board?" Well, some say that I'm gonna earn it honestly and work hard every day. Then, some say that won't work so, I'm going to cheat and I'm going to cut my supervisor and his supervisor and try to get their job. I think that's what happens in a gang. I think that once they [gang members] feel that power and they understand what control they have over individuals who would steal for them and who would kill for them, they become like anybody else who gets power hungry.

Being curious, the researcher asked if there was more white gang activity or black gang activity in Sarah County? He stated:

In Sarah County, they don't call them gangs unless they are black and poor. The white individuals who hang out in Sarah Square at night drinking beer and busting bottles, nobody says anything to them because they are so and so's kids. But there are more whites who need some mentoring than there are blacks.

Mr. Boyd encouraged the researcher's efforts with the hope that this study could help families in similar conditions to safeguard their children in an effective manner.

I don't think that you can ever give up on children. John was hungry for attention and wanted to belong to something. This young man should have

been in school, but he is dead. So, maybe just writing about his life and trying to figure out why he went in the direction that he did may help someone. We've got to get back to helping each other.

Mr. Troy Edwards, a gangs and guns expert from the Dixie City Police Department, briefed the researcher on the Westside Crips:

These people matriculated from Los Angeles, California. Westside is a pseudonym for the Westside of Los Angeles, California. When they came to Dixie City, they located around the westside and the northwest side of Dixie City and they started calling themselves Westside Crips as well because of the location of their gang activity. The behavior of gang members varies because there are different levels of members. You have leaders, you have hardcore gang members, you have wannabe's, and you have associates. So, the different levels call for different behavior patterns. You have a leader who is someone who has participated in gang activity for a long period of time. He is the one who gives out orders but does not get involved in criminal activity. Therefore, he acts as a recruiter for the gang. He gets part of the profits that the gang makes. Then, you have your hardcore member who lives and sleeps gang activities. That's all he wants to do. His life revolves around being a member of a gang and he is a gang banger. He's the one who takes the orders from the leader and goes out and commits the crime; he's the one who intimidates the other gang members as well as citizens; he's spent time in juvenile as well as prison; and it really doesn't mean that much to him. He carries the gun and makes the wanna-be's and associates stay in line.

When asked about the mental state of a gang member, Mr. Edwards said:

Remember that most gang members are involved in gang activity and this evolves around their whole life. So, they really don't have that much time for the educational process. What they usually do is assimilate by going to school but they actually won't go to school. In order to fool their parents, they will get on the school bus and once that school bus drops them off at school they will go out into the community or the safe houses that they have where they can commit their criminal activity. Most of them use school as their alibi. Whenever they went out and committed a criminal activity they would say they were at school. They would go to school and sign-in to make sure that they are on the role that day. Then, they would go out and commit a criminal activity. If they are approached by a law enforcement officer, they would say that if you check the record you will see that I was in school that day. Unfortunately, truancy is one of the biggest things we find. They are intelligent people; they have the capability to learn; but they do not have the motivation to learn. These children's self-esteem must be built up in the home,

in school and within the community. They must stop depending on the gang for this.

Since the Dixie City Police Department has been studying gangs and gang activity, they have found that one of the prerequisites of a gang member is to carry a gun. You usually get your name from the type of gun you carry. If you are a little person, you usually get a 380 or a .22. So, gang activity does involve gun play one way or another. Fifty percent of your juvenile shootings today involve gang members who actually go out and use guns.

Mr. Edwards assured that his department was always involved in assisting parents to help them identify the gang problems and the gang signs and symbols of their children. He agreed that parents must monitor a child's activities beginning when they reach twelve or thirteen years old.

Be aware of the friends that your child(ren) have; be aware of the signs that are involved in gang activity; be aware of the music that they listen to; be aware of the clothes that they wear; and be aware of the type of language they use. If you see a behavioral change, that means your child is possible in a gang or being initiated into a gang.

Apparently John's mother was not aware of these signs or chose not to accept them.

Mr. Edwards analyzed John's situation.

John was probably accepted into the gang because the gang most effective recruitment tool is to take a child who has behavioral problems in school, someone we consider as unruly or a 'bad' child. He had problem with authority and was totally disruptive in class because of his image. The image is "it's not cool to be in school." So, the gang usually target those who are being disruptive in school and they will tell them that they can give them an alternative to being disruptive in school. The gang will promise them status where they can intimidate people.

Referring to the meeting place of the gang members, Mr. Edwards stated that Harry's in downtown was sectioned off for their hangout purposes. The Crips would meet at the fountain area, the Bloods at the patio area, and the other gang members on the upper patio level. One could go by Harry's everyday after school, around 3:00 p.m., and find them there.

That was the reason John moved so much between Herman County and Harry's. He called Dixie gangs the non-traditional gangs who view the whole city as their turf and have members from all parts of the city. Mr. Edwards considered John as a hardcore gang member. He confidently said:

Let me tell you something, from the assessment on John, I can tell that he was a hardcore gang member. This is said, because he showed no inclination of ever wanting to change his pattern or lifestyle. When you go into an incarceration system like Sarah County Prison, there are also other gang members there. John had to go into prison with a reputation. The problem is when you go into a system such as Sarah County Prison, you become indoctrinated by other hardcore gang members. One of the reasons is that the gang member has to survive while in prison. So, if your gang is part of that system, you stay with them in a section of the prison system. In order to survive, you don't intermingle. When John went into Sarah County Prison, he knew that someone was going to take care of him while he was on the inside. But, once John was out of prison, he had become more violent than he was before he went into the system. He had two tattoos and this was not uncommon for gang members. He carried two different social security numbers because of the many times he had been in the juvenile system which would alleviate him getting more time. John's social security number is what he was identified by. So, one number will show only a certain amount of crimes and the other social security number would only show a certain amount of crimes. You may not believe this, but, Black gang members try to emulate what they see on television. So, the gangster rappers are some of the most influential people in America today. The main message in their music is, it is okay to be in a gang. Black children from ages eleven to thirteen can't tell the difference between fact and fiction. Remember, that the primary theme of gangster rap is the glorification of being a gang member. It's only one more thing that I would like to say. Hardcore gang members usually don't get to live past twenty-four years old. How sad, John was only 22!

The Church Perspective

Rev. Smith, in an interview on January 12, 1995, shared his opinions of gang members. He viewed gang members as consistently arrogant, streetwise, and concentrating their energies in dysfunctional and destructive activities. Some, he observed, may have traces of behavioral disorders in school; some may suffer from mild mental retardation; some may

be indecisive; some want to get ahead fast by their own posse; and, some are over-ambitious and exhibit extreme machismo.

According to Rev. Smith, gang members have the ability to have a long or short life depending upon their position in the gang.

For instance, an OG (Original Gangster) who gives out the orders has other people around to protect him. Every now and then the OG has to flex his muscles. He has to do something that will continue to strike fear in the other gang members, so he kills someone. A gang member rules by intimidation and fear. On the other hand, the gang member who is designated as the assassin, the strong arm, the one who is designated as the street level drug pusher or dealer may find that their lives are short lived. For example, there is a queen bee (the OG); there are worker bees (those at the bottom of the totem pole; there are other supervisor bees (like the gangs lieutenants) and they keep everything in order. But, you find every now and then that somewhere in that colony there is a breakdown. This can lead to the OG or some other gang member being killed. The occupational hazards for gang members are the police, other organizations who may want a part of your territory, people wanting to get rid of you in terms of community so they have a lot of forces working against you.

At an early age, John should have had three strong influences. He should have had a very strong home environment filled with all types of positive stimuli that would have helped him in developing his character. He needed to have a strong educational environment, and by all means he needed to have a very vital and viable Christian influence in his life. All of these things bring about balance and you'll find that in his life there were some things that were not balanced.

Rev. Smith sees potential for churches to develop effective, efficient, and viable programs, such as a ministry of care, a ministry of outreach, and a ministry of redirection. Specifically, he seeks to deprogram the child from the environment in which he or she was brought up and then reprogram him or her into the Christian aspect that he or she desperately

needs to be well rounded. The church has to be there for daily outreach, he believes, and the doors have to be kept open. He further emphasizes that:

The pastor has to be one who interacts with children, the church has to interact, the church has to embrace, and what we find is that churches have programs but often-times it's not focused. How can a child feel that he's worth a great deal when the church is not reaching out? Also, we recognize that the school system has to change its day to day operation. The child must be the school's focal point. The school system itself has to adapt changes in its way of implementation of curriculum that is going to be appealing to the young person. Students today have a lot more to contend with, more obstacles, and the only way that the school system is going to be able to complete and show these children that it is important that you work hard now for a reward later is that it's going to take schools having a hands-on-type of curriculum. In other words, the school system will have to stop throwing programs at a problem. It is a shame that John's essential needs were not met.

CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides a summary of theoretical aspects conceptualized by the most influential thinkers in the field of gangs as they related to the lifestyle of John Doe.

Strain Perspective

Strain theory postulates that: (1) social conditions place pressures on people differently throughout the class structure, and people react individually to these conditions; (2) that the institutionalized means for pursuing the goals of wealth and status are clearly set forth in American society, but these means are not feasible for most of those at the bottom of the social structure; and, (3) lower working-class boys in American society are ill prepared by virtue of their socialization to compete with their middle-class counterparts for position and success in an intensely competitive society (Cohen, 1955; Miller, 1958; Clinard, 1964; Merton, 1968). At school, for example, they are judged and found less worthy by middle-class standards of behavior and performance. Because they are denied status by respectable society, they suffer loss of self-respect, feelings of guilt, shame, and resentment, become 'status frustrated,' and therefore have to cope with adjustment problems. Merton (1938:673) observed that:

when a system of cultural values extols, virtually above all else, certain common symbols of success for the population at large, while its social

structure rigorously restricts or completely eliminates access to approved modes of acquiring these symbols for a considerable part of the same population, and that antisocial behavior ensues on a considerable scale.

As we have seen in Chapter III, John was a lower working-class boy, who experienced poor socialization and was judged to be incompetent at school. He suffered the loss of self-respect, feelings of shame and bitterness, experienced behavioral disorderly problems, and eventually became discouraged at the high school level. These restrictions and strains in the early part of John's life might have contributed to his subsequent anti-social behavior.

Differential Association Perspective

Edwin H. Sutherland's (1939), main principles of Differential Association are that criminal behavior is a learned behavior; and that delinquent and criminal behavior - like other actions, attitudes, beliefs, and values which people exhibit - is owned by groups, not by individuals. Just as a collectivity owns the English language, people sharing subcultural norms own delinquent and criminal behavior patterns and children learn such behavior through interaction with the collectivity. Some individuals are surrounded by persons who define the legal codes as rules to be observed, and are thus taught to be noncriminal (even anti-criminal). Others are surrounded by persons whose definitions are favorable to the violation of legal codes, and thus in both subtle and manifest ways are taught to act criminally. As individuals conform to a group's expectations, they exhibit the group's behavior patterns - legal or illegal, conformist or deviant. But most persons are simultaneously surrounded by definitions both unfavorable and favorable to law violation. Sutherland's principle holds that whether they become criminals or not depends upon the ratio of these two kinds of behavior

patterns in their life experiences. Clearly, John was surrounded by a majority of deviants from whom he learned the definitions of violation of legal codes and acts of criminality.

Subcultural Perspective

Subcultural theory maintains that spontaneous violence is particularly prevalent among late adolescent to middle age males in lower-class settings. Also it was conceded that social structure or other factors may be responsible for the emergence of the subculture. When a group of deviants join together they adopt a deviant subculture that contains two major elements: first, a specialized vocabulary or argot, composed of special words and idiomatic expressions, connoting particular social meanings, and identifying important persons, objects, or events in the world. Secondly, it contains a cognitive perspective or framework for interpreting their activities and lifestyle. This ideology has a history developed by carriers (peers, colleagues, and team players) over time. It has its own value system specifying what is desirable which has been translated into behavioral expectations. Subculture carriers evaluate one another's performances in terms of these norms and support worthy peers for who they are and what they do; the subculture provides security, and offers a structural base for interaction. The literature indicates that deviant subcultures manifest themselves in at least two identifiable forms: delinquent subcultures and subcultures of violence.

The subculture of violence theory holds that a set of ideas (values, norms, and behavioral expectations) exists among lower class males in segregated urban neighborhoods which generate violent behavior. For example, such ideas formulate an ideology that supports the quick resort to physical combat as a measure of daring, courage or defense of status as a form of cultural expression. Therefore, in certain situations a male is expected or required

to resort to violence as a means of maintaining status and settling disputes. This subculture reportedly has arisen in the past for specific historical reasons (traceable in part from the South) and is transmitted from one generation to another as a set of ideas (Best and Luckenbill, 1994; Cash, 1941; Short and Stradtbeck, 1965; Curtis, 1975; Weis and Sederstrom, 1981; Wolfgang and Ferracuti, 1982; Vold and Bernard, 1986).

In this case, John adopted certain values, norms, and behavioral prescriptions similar to those of urban gangs that fall within the categories of delinquent and violent subcultures. He, as viewed by his mother, neighbor, classmate, counselor, gangs and guns expert, and the minister, may have adopted these subcultures as a solution to his status frustration and employed the mechanism of "reaction-formation" (See Chapters IV and V). This situation can be more clearly explained in Walter B. Miller's (1958) framework. To him, certain features or **focal concerns** of lower-class cultures facilitated the emergence of delinquency: getting into and staying out of trouble, being a **tough guy**, outsmarting or **conning others**, searching for **excitement or thrills**, considering one's life in the control of **fate, destiny, or luck**, and, finally, being **ambivalent** about independence.

Furthermore, as Miller emphasizes, for an adolescent male reared in a female-based household and bereft of the stable economic support of an adult male, the gang is the most stable and solidarity primary group he has ever belonged to. The activity patterns of the group require a high level of intra-group solidarity. Perhaps it is for this reason that John developed a macho stance and was conscious about not mentioning the names of any of the gang members with whom he was associated and/or interacted (Chapter IV).

The Generality of Deviance Perspective

The leading generality of deviance perspective rests upon the assumptions: (1) that a person is free to commit delinquent acts because his ties to the conventional order have some how been broken; (2) the essence of internalization of norms, conscience, or superego thus lies in the bonding of the individual to others; and, (3) if the "others" have criminal behaviors then individuals learn such behavior (Hirschi, 1969). People who lack self-control tend to be impulsive, insensitive, physical and concrete (rather than abstract), tend toward risk-taking, short-sightedness, and nonverbalness; and, therefore are likely to engage in criminal and analogous deviant acts. These traits are identifiable in childhood, rise to a peak in late adolescence and decline sharply thereafter, but persist throughout life. The major cause of this low self-control is purported to be ineffective child-rearing (dearth of discipline and affection in the individual's home), and failure to bond with conventional associations and institutions. People of this type when exposed to weak external social controls, are likely to become generalized deviants who commit a wide variety of deviant and criminal acts with no inclination to pursue a specific criminal act or a pattern of deviant and/or criminal behavior to the exclusion of others (Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990; Akers, 1994). Thus, criminality results from the individual's tendency or propensity to seek short-term, immediate pleasure without concentrated effort in the absence of social bonds. Findings supporting this theory have been found for populations involved in adolescent and young adult deviance (Osgood et al., 1988; Caspi et al., 1994); for career criminals (Blumstein, Cohen, and Farrington, 1988); and for recidivistic felons (Petersilia, Greenwood, and Lavin, 1977; Gould and Gould, 1992).

In the present study, John was found to be lacking self-control and being impulsive, insensitive, and physical. He also took risks and was short-sighted. He engaged in violent deviant acts right from childhood. They rouse to a peak in late adolescence. Because he was killed at the age of 22, it is impossible to determine whether his violent behavior would have declined as he entered adulthood. It is reasonable to assume that his low self-control might have stemmed from ineffective child-rearing. That is, a dearth of discipline and affection in the home due to: (1) his mother's frequent absence from the house because of her long working-hours; (2) a total absence of father at home; and, (3) when present, his mother's boyfriend and brother abuse of him. After all, a child who lacks close dependent ties to his parents can have little opportunity or desire to model himself after them and to internalize their standards of behavior.

In the absence of such internalized controls, the child's aggression is likely to be expressed in an immediate, direct and socially unacceptable fashion (Bandura, 1963). John was present oriented and failed to bond with conventional institutions such as school. Moreover, his arrest history (see Chapter II) discloses a wide variety of delinquent and criminal acts without any specialized pattern of offenses. These findings designate John as a generalized deviant.

The Labeling Perspective

Frederick Thrasher's work on juvenile gangs in Chicago (1936), was one of the first instances in which the consequences of official labels of delinquency were recognized as potentially negative. A few years later, Frank Tannenbaum (1938), introduced the term "dramatization of evil," in which he argued that officially labeling someone as a delinquent

could result in the person becoming the very thing he is described as being. Edwin Lemert (1951), developed the concepts of primary and secondary deviance which became the central elements of the first systematic development of what has come to be known as labeling theory. Primary deviance refers to original acts of nonconformity that may be caused by a number of factors. This form of deviance is generally considered to be undetected, or not recognized, as deviant by others. Primary deviants have not adjusted their behavior to accommodate societal reactions to their deviance. Secondary deviance, on the other hand, refers to deviance that is committed as a result of the problems of self-identity and social interaction which are generated by the identification of the actor as a deviant. It is a new and often more serious form of deviance that is committed, in addition to the original causes of the primary deviance. Thus, secondary deviance is nonconformity created by the "pains of labeling."

The theoretical legacy of this line of reasoning within sociology may be traced to the work of Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert Mead. Cooley is credited with the term "looking glass" self (1964:184-185), and Mead is associated with the notion of the "generalized other" (Strauss, 1964:216-228). Both the concepts stress the importance of social interactions in the development of self-feelings and social identities. The conceptualization of self-concept, per se, is often traced to the work of William James (Rosenberg, 1979).

One of the basic assumptions of labeling theory is that initial acts of delinquency are caused by a wide variety of factors. These factors, however, are relatively unimportant in the scheme of things, which leads to a second assumption that the primary factor in the repetition

of delinquency is the fact of having been formally labeled as a delinquent. This assertion is accompanied by another idea, which may be presented as a third assumption that repeated acts of delinquency are influenced by formal labels because such labels eventually alter a person's self-image to the point where the person begins to identify himself as a delinquent and act accordingly. Thus the view of the labeling perspective is that a negative, or delinquent, self-image follows the act of delinquency rather than precedes delinquency. A fourth assumption of the labeling approach is that the official application of the label of delinquent is dependent on a host of criteria (poor family relationships, neighborhood conflict, peer pressure, psychological and/or biological abnormality, or prodelinquent learning experiences) in addition to, or other than, the behavior itself (such as the offender's age, sex, race, and social class, as well as the organizational norms of official agencies and departments).

Regardless of the cause, if a youth's delinquent behavior is detected by law enforcement or school officials, the offender will be given a negative social label that can stigmatize him throughout life. John's mother verbalized about the labeling of her son in her interview (see Chapter V). She admitted her failure to recognize John's primary deviance, but noticed the labeling of John from the time he entered high school to the time that he became a part of the criminal justice system. John also appeared to fit in the framework of David Matza (1957), who theorized that the juvenile delinquent would appear to be at least partially committed to the dominant social order in that he frequently exhibits guilt or shame when he violates its proscriptions, accords approval to certain conforming figures, and distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate targets for his deviance. In order to assuage his guilt,

the delinquent employs rationalizations or justifications for his deviant behavior both before and after the delinquent act. Examples of these "techniques of neutralization" are the denial of responsibility ("I didn't mean it"), the denial of injury ("I didn't really hurt anybody"), the denial of the victim ("those queers had it coming to them"), the condemnation of the condemners ("The corrupt police always pick on me"), and the appeal to higher loyalties ("The gang forced me to do it"). Not only does this argument apply to John (see Chapter IV), it applies to his mother as well when she found excuses for each and every wrong doing by John as discussed in Chapter V.

In conclusion, John is a typical example of "delinquent behavior" and fits well within explanations of all major theoretical conceptions - strain, differential association, subculture of violence, and labeling. He had the disposition of aggression as a way of satisfaction against his victims because they had casted slander on his self-image, toughness, and/or status. Also, he tended to perceive his victim(s) as a source of physical danger, which perceivably required him to become violent. He continued his deviant behavior because he wanted to be known as a person of considerable toughness so that no one would "monkey" with him, challenge him, and treat him unfairly. Therefore, he justified that he would initiate conflicts with his victims to demonstrate power, and would resort to aggression to satisfy his needs.

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